

The Mershon Center was the primary sponsor of the Columbus chapter of the United Nations Association's two-day intercollegiate forum, which asked students to debate the relevance of the United Nations system in the twenty-first century.

For two days, delegates from UNA chapters at universities throughout Ohio and neighboring states discussed various aspects of the UN system, including the security council, the role of NGOs, the World Trade Organization, and health care.

The event began with a keynote address given by Gillian Sorensen, Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations in Office of the Secretary General of the United Nations and Samuel Brock, Deputy Director of the Office of U.N. Political Affairs in the Department of State. She argued that the U.N. remains relevant because its programs extend beyond peacekeeping, which only accounts for twenty percent of its activities: it also looks at disarmament, development, humanitarian relief, promoting human rights for women and children, spearheading environmental initiatives, and others.

The war in Iraq has brought attention to the United Nations recently. Sorensen said that the United States is a colossus that sometimes sends mixed messages to other nations about its commitment to international relationships, but that the U.S. simply cannot fight some problems by itself. Those issues that are truly global—like the environment and the spread of disease—need international cooperation, and the U.N. is well-positioned to deal with such issues.

She added that the United States is feared by other nations because of its military strength—and apparent willingness to use it—but not always respected. Its power also makes the U.S. be a central part of the U.N., but its presence is not always welcomed. She said that many countries welcome true leadership, which includes fulfilling its financial obligations.

Sorensen admitted the U.N cannot function without the United States, because it is simply excessively idealistic to expect such an organization to do so much with so few resources, a situation that would be compounded by an American withdrawal.

Samuel Brock said that the U.S. is part of the world, and that it does not, as some have argued, shirk its international responsibilities, but he lamented that the United States often does not get credit for the many international programs it supports without the U.N.

He said that the U.S. is not likely to fully commit to the United Nations plans until some issues have been address: Washington would like to contribute its leadership and expertise, not just its money to initiatives, like the war against terror, that are especially important to the Americans.

Further, the U.S. would like to see a reform of the general assembly, including the creation of a "wise men's" panel, an agenda for the assembly that would cluster similar issues together and help de-clutter an unmanageable workload, a more powerful leadership that could terminate ineffective or old agenda items, a focus on "results-based" management and budgeting, and a cessation of what Brock said was an excessive use of "emergency sessions." He was confident that these reforms would allow the U.N. to be a more streamlined and effective organization whose success would eventually speak for itself. Brock said that making the U.N. a viable

and capable group would inspire Washington to commit its resources, support, and energy.